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the Italian cottage. Let it not be thought that we are wasting time in the contemplation of its beauties; even though they are of a kind which the architect can never imitate, because he has no command over time, and no choice of situation; and which he ought not to imitate, if he could, because they are only locally desirable or admirable. Our object, let it always be remembered, is not the attainment of architectural data, but the formation of taste.

October 12, 1837.

#### OUR COINAGE.

The coinage of a country, while it may be considered as illustrative of its institutions, advance in civilization, and progress in the fine Arts, may be made useful in strengthening its character, and cultivating its taste. Leaving to the learned in such matters, an exposition of the historical use of coins, I would call the attention of the people to the fact, that large sums of money have been spent upon our coinage, without any adequate result; and that our gold, silver, and copper, instead of being examples of the artistic ability of the country, are far below the requirements of public taste. Science and the mechanic arts are called upon to furnish the basis of an excellent coinage, and they perform their work faithfully, but that which gives dignity and beauty, that which distinguishes the civilized from the barbarous is utterly wanting. The devices upon our coins are incoherent, unmeaning, monstrous; responding to no idea of the people, whose servants utter them; unworthy to compete in execution with the buttons on foreign liveries. After losing sight, for some years, of the United States coin, my eyes having been accustomed to the delicately-cut European currency, and wishing to procure American gold in Havre, I hesitated accepting it at the hands of a respectable banker, its clumsy execution giving it so strongly the appearance of a barefaced counterfeit. I found it was good gold, only spoiled in appearance. It is unnecessary to waste much criticism upon the "fowl of freedom," as he now appears upon our coins. This bastard offspring of heraldry, rejoicing in his unnatural ugliness, is so far removed from nature, that he needs a label quite as much as the figure of Liberty, which is furnished with one. He seems to have been nailed up as his kinsman the hawk is sometimes served, and in like manner to have suffered the vicissitudes of wind and rain.

But the Liberty! Involuntarily we exclaim with the noble Frenchwoman, "Oh, Liberty! how many atrocities are perpetrated in thy name!" Her millions of effigies are scattered among our people, to the utter confusion of every American idea of the word. *This* is a Liberty that would rejoice tyrants. Her dislocated limbs indicate weakness, her timid attitude expresses fear, for she is looking hurriedly over her shoulder in manifest alarm. In her left hand she holds a staff; would it were a distaff, to give some hint at independence, instead of supporting a cap, which seems ready for use in begging. I think we should call this cap, the office cap. The shield, which serves as an ostentatious label, is also useful to hide her means of support; perhaps the office cap is deemed sufficient. Her feet are completely enveloped in drapery, and perhaps

this is better; since, if little drapery covers a multitude of sins, what might be done with a great deal. We will pass by the shapeless and ill-matched arms, and the melancholy length of legs, confident that the reader will agree with us, that this figure is a shameful caricature of a most noble subject. Is this the best thing that we can show upon our coins, as the result of the last twenty years' progress? Is this the artistic language by which we would have foreign nations respect our institutions, or posterity measure our refinement? So it will be, and while we write this protest against the indecent neglect, while California is yet uncoined, and our currency in its youth, this same system will continue. It will be found that nobody is responsible, nobody to blame, that money will do its work just as well with one device as another, and so the matter will end. It may be otherwise; it may be that a true view of the subject will come home to somebody who has influence somewhere; that the person somewhere will stir up somebody else, to try to do something about it; and if the person represented as somebody else, does try, and succeeds, and if he is a capable man, he will merit, and I doubt not receive, the thanks of all persons of sense as well as taste, of the present and future generations.

G.

#### LETTERS FROM ITALY—No. III.

FLORENCE, August 10, 1854.

DEAR PAULINA:—The ideas which I endeavored to express to you in my last letter, in relation to the early Christian Art, were suggested by a certain picture, painted by the Fra Angelico, of whom mention was made, as representing that Art in its purity, which picture is hung upon the wall opposite our corridor window, chosen to illumine my page this lovely summer morning. I have reserved this painting to be the last object in this long outer hall, of which to write, although it is one of the first in point of locality, and must be passed by all who visit the galleries, and for this reason—few love it. Yonder painter—he with the Titian-like head, who copies Titian, and is even now making a reduced copy of the wonderful Venus, and what is truly rare, who *can* do it, and he alone of all the multitude of artists who throng the galleries of Italy, *he* smiled a smile of gentle pity when I spoke to him of the Angels by Fra Angelico.

He thought I loved Art, that I had a soul that recognized the fine, subtle mystery, the marvellous significance of *color*. He thought I was one of the few privileged, blessed ones, permitted to ascend to the higher circle, the celestial plane. "The holy city! Not in form shall lie its glory—not in form, but in the purity, in the inconceivable magnificence of *color*. Oh! it was a prophecy—an inspiration—the voice of God, revealing to us, through the medium of one of the most exquisite organizations the world has ever known, that prophet of Patmos, the nature of angelic worlds, and lo! above all, the gates of pearl, the golden streets, the walls of precious stones, filling the heavens with colors too gorgeous for mortal vision. Ah, see! for us, the pearly lights, the gold, and the carnations! See the inward gleaming blue of human eyes, like the light of gems! Mark the broad splendor of yonder drapery, and note the exquisite *quality* of all the hues," and he gazed steadfastly, with half averted head, upon the matchless work of the Venetian, unmindful of the surrounding throng, and forgetful of him whose love of the unskilled Angelico, had suggested his "rapture." I felt that it was true, this estimate of the effect of light. Color was to me a perpetual

joy, at all times, everywhere; I felt its full significance, it was to my eye what music was to my ear; I believed, and still believe, that no single influence acting upon the spirit through the senses, has the power that hues and tones have. So sensitive had I become to their influence that the great stained window back of the altar in Santa Maria Novella was within me, a power identical with that of a most glorious anthem, or the pealing of bells. Flowers reached the same cord which vibrated beneath the touch of a bird-note, and I believe that the poetical association of the rose-tone and the nightingale-tone had its foundation in the profoundest depths of the human soul. Here also I recall a fancy, it may seem, but one which fills me with happiness, and one, moreover, that the developed soul will find a large truth, I doubt not. Let one who is susceptible to the influence of light and color, gaze into the depths of summer sky at night, when the whole dome above him is filled with violet-hued light, and gemmed over with stars infinitely varied in their tints, yet all toned to the finest harmony, and he will experience two sensations, equally rapturous, one of which he will trace to the immeasurable beauty of colors acting upon him, and the other beyond that, as the stars are beyond the violet sky, he will recognize, or imagine perhaps, to be the effect of sweet sounds, inaudible to sense, yet, nevertheless received, and answered too, by the finer spirit within, and through which he comprehends the significance of the prophet's words, "The stars sang together."

How then, in view of this feeling for color, could I love a work of Art, wherein, when I saw as an artist, I found no truth of coloring, indeed, found all the precious principles of light and shade, of tone and time, neglected, nay, violated.

In order to answer this question which daily arose, especially after my interview with my Titian-like friend, I have waited, and, notwithstanding my questionings and the sneers of my fellow students, kept my love for the saints and young angels of the artist monk of Fiesole, through all, direct and deep; and I am now convinced that the power exerted by these creations of his hand over those who revere truth, as well as love the symbols of truth, in spite of such enormous defects as false drawing and false coloring, proves that in some other respect they must conform most exquisitely to the laws, the deep vital principles of Art. The color of yonder angel's face, the one with the golden trumpet, does not present itself as color; I see only the ineffable glory of the countenance. It comes as beauty and purity immaterialized, and my soul entertains it as a guest whose footsteps shook not the threshold of sense.

The rich golds and carnations, made richer by the water-hues of the Lagunes, which Titian and Giorgione gathered from the gleaming arms and cheeks of Venetian maids, would find no place upon *that* form, *those* features; for color is related to emotion, to passion, and that by fixed laws, just as difficult to comprehend as is the emotional nature of man. The coloring of the Venus of the Tribune would be more false, were it transferred to this angel's head, than these feeble tints from the palette of the monk. Were it thus I should no longer be unconscious of the art employed; the exquisite flesh tints would assert themselves, as such, and the unrivalled spiritual beauty of the painting would be marred. With the Venus it is otherwise. *There* the tones harmonize completely with the best thought, the highest ideal of the subject. The colors spread upon the canvass in such rich profusion, upon drapery, jewels and flowers, are as so many sweet sounds brought into perfect accord with the principal note, strengthening and confirming *that* in its expression of the splendid theme; hence through this truly wonderful harmony the painting justly takes its place at the head of the department of color in Art. But with these faces of saints, such harmony is be-